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DELEGATION STUDIES CONGO'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Washington, DC – OCTOBER 24, 2006 – A delegation from IFES arrives in Democratic Republic of Congo Thursday to witness the October 29 elections and study how best to support the next step in the country's democratic development. The four-member delegation will be led by Pierre Cornillon, former secretary-general of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and IFES Africa Director Chris Hennemeyer.

IFES is the premiere U.S. organization advising election officials in Congo as the country prepares to choose its president and provincial legislators. IFES also is leading the country's largest voter and civic education project, reaching out to more than half the country's 25 million registered voters.

Despite the violence that followed the first round of elections in July, Hennemeyer said he believes the October 29 vote will largely be peaceful.

"It is our belief that violence will be the exception, rather than the rule, and that the vast majority of voters will cast their ballots peaceably," said Hennemeyer, adding that it is essential for the international community to continue supporting Congo well after the elections.

The delegation will meet with government officials, partners and donors to study ways to support Congo in its critical post-election phase. Congo is in the process of decentralizing its government to give more power and revenue to its provincial parliaments. IFES is working to help organize these local elections, scheduled for 2007, and strengthen the ability of local leaders to meet the needs of their constituents.

The following experts are available for media interviews about Congo's democratic development:

Pierre Cornillon served as secretary-general of the Inter-Parliamentary Union from 1987-1998 and spent more than 30 years with the organization in various posts. Cornillon is a renowned expert on parliamentary diplomacy and comparative parliamentary law, subjects on which he has spoken throughout the world and authored numerous papers and publications. **Cornillon is fluent in French, Spanish and English.**

Christian Hennemeyer has more than 20 years of professional experience in sub-Saharan Africa, having lived in the west, central and north regions of the continent. Hennemeyer built the capacity of civil society groups, human rights groups and non-governmental organizations and ran major relief operations in Rwanda during the genocide, and Burundi, Liberia, Congo and Sierra Leone during their various armed conflicts. **Hennemeyer is fluent in English and French.**

Carmina Sanchis-Ruescas works as IFES' chief of party in the Democratic Republic of Congo. With IFES, Sanchis-Ruescas has managed civic participation, community mobilization and advocacy projects in Kosovo and has provided technical advice to Liberia's National Elections Commission. Sanchis-Ruescas previously served as director for a European Union-funded program on decentralizing local government. **She is fluent in English, Spanish and French.**

IFES is an international, nonprofit organization that supports the building of democratic societies.